

Pink Blob and Dog Vomit: Part One

I will always remember my first slime mold.

I'd never seen the like before.

In fact I'd never even known they existed.

I wasn't long in my current post – 6 months or so after being an Access Project Officer for 3 years so my natural history ID was a little bit rusty, but luckily my hobby is my job is my job is my hobby (very useful when furloughed for nearly 18 months and worried about 'imposter syndrome' on return) and I was still curious about everything as all us rangers are – especially on espying a bright pink blob – and I mean bright! Almost fluorescent on a very old fence post in Beachen Woods, Grantown-on-Spey in the Cairngorms National Park.

I was instantly fascinated – who wouldn't be – it looked so out of place and too garish for the hazel and aspen woods I was meandering through – so of course I poked it – not expecting pink goo to spurt out all over my finger – yeah yeah I know I should've used a stick to poke it with...and of course in those days we didn't all have instant cameras in our pockets and of course hadn't thought to carry the works camera – so I played around with it for a while and then headed back to the office –

Thank the universe for the internet – inputting 'pink blob' into Google the first thing to come up is – a truly horrible dress but further down - slime mold – really? Slime mold – what on earth is that?! And why had I not heard of these before?



Wolfs milk - Lycogala Terrestris
Picture Jeanne Debs (Flickr)

Turns out there's loads of them, 900 in fact. Found in all different colours; orange, pink, yellow, grey, brown except for 'true' green as they lack chlorophyll. One species freaked out a pal of mine when he found a deciduous tree in Laggan covered in this clear gelatinous slime. Luckily for me he had the foresight to collect a sample in a jam jar in the hope I could identify it for him. I was delighted to tell him that it was a slime mold and equally delighted

to see all the nuclei within each cell. We hurried back to the tree to get a photo but all traces had vanished...



So a slime mold is a legless, brainless, unicellular creature that bands together to find food – what?! A unicellular creature coming together – how, why?

Slime mold is, in fact, a soil-dwelling amoeba which breaks down rotting vegetation feeding on bacteria, yeast, and fungus. They are usually microscopic and reproduce by releasing spores after drying out. They are harmless and some species can grow up to several square metres and masses up to 20kg!

Part Two (and references) to follow!

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